

Oropom language

Oropom (Oworopom, Oyoropom, Oropoi) is an African language, possibly spurious and, if real, almost certainly extinct. The language was purportedly once spoken by the Oropom people in northeastern Uganda and northwestern Kenya between the Turkwel River, the Chemorongit Mountains, and Mount Elgon.

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	Oropom
Native to	Kenya, Uganda
Extinct	c. 1950
Language family	unclassified
Language codes	
ISO 639-3	<i>None</i> (mis)
Glottolog	(insufficiently attested or not a distinct language) orop1234 (http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/orop1234)^[1]

History of research

There is only one article containing any original research on the language, Wilson (1970), which only a handful of other articles discuss. Wilson's article furnishes only a short word list, and was written at a time when the language, if it existed, was nearly extinct. The article was based mainly on the limited memories of two very old women, one "a child of one of the residual Oropom families that had remained after the break-up of the Oropom here (Matheniko county)" who "remembered a few words of the language", the other an old lady called Akol "descended from the prisoners taken by the Karimojong on the Turkwel" who was "able to furnish many Oropom words". Under the circumstances, only the barest details of Oropom could be ascertained.

On this basis, Wilson concluded that it must have had at least two dialects: one spoken around the Turkwel area, containing a significant number of Luo words, and some Bantu words, and one spoken around Matheniko county with fewer Luo words. Both contain Kalenjin loanwords.

Classification

Wilson ascribed it to the Khoisan group, seemingly based solely on its physical appearance; but this identification is unreliable; Harold C. Fleming describes it as a "ridiculous suggestion". Elderkin (1983) says that "The Oropom data of Wilson (1970) shows some resemblances to Kuliak, some of which could well be mediated through Nilotic, with which it seems to have more resemblances (F. Rottland, personal communication)... There are many fewer resemblances worth noting with Hadza and only a minimal number with Sandawe." He quotes 8 potentially similar words between Oropom and Hadza, and 4 between Oropom and Sandawe. Harold Fleming also notes that "initial inspection suggests some possible commonality" between Oropom and the Kuliak languages, a probably Nilo-Saharan relic group found in Northern Uganda among such tribes as the Ik. However, in the absence of further work, Oropom remains an unclassified language.

Skepticism

Bernd Heine, who surveyed the area less than ten years after Wilson and found no trace of the language, expressed skepticism that it existed at all.^[2] Both Lionel Bender and Roger Blench have opined that the language was made up as a joke.^[2] Souag (2004) lists several motives Wilson's informants might have had to fabricate the language, and observes that even in his article, Wilson notes that he had to deal with "charlatans" once word got out that he was looking for anyone with knowledge of the language.

Wordlist

This wordlist, taken from the appendix to Wilson (1970), is based on Akol's memories (and thus is considered by Wilson as belonging to the "Turkwell dialect"). He says that he collected words from the other dialect as well, but apparently never published them. The list consists of less than a hundred words, which are likely to be all the vocabulary that will ever be known of the language.

- | | |
|--|---|
| ▪ Arrow: <i>motit</i> | ▪ Eye: <i>kongiye</i> |
| ▪ Bad: <i>giritto</i> | ▪ Fat: <i>moda</i> |
| ▪ Black: <i>timu</i> | ▪ Father: <i>mamunyu</i> |
| ▪ Blue: <i>puthia</i> | ▪ Fire: <i>emaa</i> |
| ▪ To boil water: <i>mak</i> | ▪ Fish: <i>karu</i> |
| ▪ Bow: <i>terema</i> | ▪ food: <i>araukoo</i> |
| ▪ To burn: <i>mala</i> | ▪ Fool: <i>bung</i> |
| ▪ Breast: <i>kisina</i> | ▪ Foot: <i>apaukoo</i> |
| ▪ Brother: <i>lukiya</i> | ▪ Gazelle: <i>tuth</i> |
| ▪ Bull: <i>losogol</i> | ▪ To give: <i>we</i> |
| ▪ Cat: <i>ariet</i> | ▪ Goat: <i>ngoror</i> |
| ▪ Cattle: <i>pange</i> | ▪ Good: <i>pau</i> |
| ▪ Chalcedony: <i>atunatun</i> | ▪ Grass: <i>purung</i> |
| ▪ Child: <i>muto</i> | ▪ Grooved design on pots: <i>nacipa</i> |
| ▪ Clever person: <i>woth</i> | ▪ Hair: <i>akopito</i> |
| ▪ To cook: <i>ipo</i> | ▪ Hand: <i>akeleng</i> |
| ▪ Cooking pot (black): <i>kiriente</i> | ▪ Hard: <i>keter</i> |
| ▪ Cooking pot: <i>kodo</i> | ▪ Honey: <i>madik</i> |
| ▪ Cow: <i>ngobo</i> | ▪ House: <i>apirgoo</i> |
| ▪ Cowrie shell: <i>pel</i> | ▪ Leopard: <i>meri</i> |
| ▪ Crocodile: <i>moro</i> | ▪ To lie down: <i>lura</i> |
| ▪ To cut: <i>tubo</i> | ▪ Lion: <i>ru</i> |
| ▪ Day: <i>awar</i> | ▪ Man: <i>muren</i> |
| ▪ To dig: <i>chege</i> | ▪ Mark on forehead: <i>nageran</i> |
| ▪ Dog: <i>kokuye</i> | ▪ To marry: <i>ritha</i> |
| ▪ Dry: <i>de-au</i> | ▪ Meat: <i>apintoo</i> |
| ▪ Ear-ring: <i>napiroi</i> | ▪ Milk: <i>coko</i> |
| ▪ Ear: <i>ki-ito</i> | ▪ Moon: <i>Pele</i> |
| ▪ Egg: <i>iken</i> | ▪ Mother-in-law: <i>yo</i> |
| ▪ Eland: <i>ongor</i> | ▪ Mother: <i>iyoo</i> |
| ▪ Enemy: <i>bu</i> | ▪ Neck bangles: <i>gorom</i> |

- Night: *riono*
- Nose: *torom*
- Oil: *konoye*
- Old man: *kuko*
- Old woman: *kukuye*
- Penis: *oyaa*
- Rain: *lat*
- To receive: *aruka*
- Red: *kopurat*
- Seer: *murwe*
- Sheep: *merék*
- Sister: *pese*
- To sit: *paja*
- To sleep: *sanán*
- Snake: *kwolta*
- Soft: *lujuk*
- Soil: *nyapid*
- To speak: *dokol*
- Spear: *ngokit*
- Stone wrist bangle: *aurare*
- Sun: *Aca*
- To swim: *redik*
- Thief: *mokorat*
- Tooth: *ne-et*
- Tree: *telegai*
- Vagina: *kibunte*
- To walk: *pauwo*
- Warrior: *lim*
- Water: *lata*
- Wet: *ret*
- White: *pele*
- Witch: *ariet*
- Wizard: *rimirim*
- Woman: *nakwanta*
- Women's apron: *ongor*

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